

# CPE appeals election results, claiming Student Government overstepped boundaries

Matthew Bruner | Staff Writer    Published 6:23 p.m. ET May 13, 2015 | Updated 10:41 a.m. ET May 14, 2015

Once again, SGA finds itself wading into murky waters regarding a questionable election process held for the Center for Participant Education (CPE). This comes just a few weeks after objection arose when Senate declined Student Body President Jean Tabares's pick Andrew Riddaugh as OGA director due to a misleading list of qualifications.

In both circumstances, different parties were concerned that SGA attempted to place undeserving members into positions without proper justification. CPE said they believe SGA overstepped their boundaries in the CPE election process, committing a gross violation of the organization's constitution, and are now appealing the election results. Tabares and other SGA members disagree, stating the election process was justified within SGA statutes.

On April 27, 2015, CPE held an election to appoint a new director and assistant director. While about a dozen active CPE members cast their votes in the election, around 20-30 inactive members from various RSOs also voted. With the exception of two people, the 20-30 inactive members admitted to never before attending a CPE meeting. Though active members held their own election with active members, SGA officials rejected the CPE's voting process and instead included the votes of the inactive members. Now, CPE is appealing these results of the election on the grounds of an invalid voting process.

The CPE's constitution describes it as "a forum for progressive and alternative ideas on education, politics and the arts," (Article II). Director and Assistant Director are two of seven officer positions in the CPE—the other five being board member positions. As a result of the vote that was cast, Sophia Palermo was elected as Director and Candace Tavares as Assistant Director.

According to the CPE'S constitution, "if consensus is not met, there will be a vote by simply majority through either a show of hands or secret ballot as decided by consensus," (Article V, Section 3). Ralph and other members of CPE began to question the students who showed up to this meeting and their right to vote in this election. In debating this issue, before consensus was achieved, Ralph and the other CPE members claim that Carolyn Harris, Student Program Coordinator for Class Councils, Institutes, and Bureaus for SGA, who oversaw the proceedings along with Student Body President, Jean Tabares, bypassed the consensus portion of the meeting and went straight to a secret ballot vote. Now in accordance with CPE constitution, one must be considered an active member in "good standing" (Article V, Section 1). The CPE holds firm that SGA overstepped their boundaries and violated CPE's constitution.

However, as stated in the CPE constitution, "membership is open to all students, professors, and members of the Tallahassee community," (Article III, Section 1). The main argument against the protesting CPE members is that according to the Student Government Statutes, which all RSOs abide by, the vote was held in proper format and should count as valid.

"All individuals present at the election meeting were eligible to vote according to the Student Government Statutes which govern CPE, an entity of SGA," said Tabares, in a response issued by SGA Press Secretary, Andrea Palermo. "The process outlined for individuals to run, such as their speeches and nominations, were followed as well."

The first of the CPE's guiding principles states "we make our decisions by consensus," (Article II) and CPE argue that consensus was never reached.

"Consensus is a formal decision making process that is an alternative to the 'majority rules' style," Ralph Wilson, CPE member, said. "We move ahead when everyone agrees on what we are doing, a difficult thing to achieve. We can literally read the room by using certain hand signals to distinguish positive or negative reactions to what's being said."

"With the bylaws that some individuals presented after the election had occurred, not prior, it has a small mention of active voting members. As stated within the RSO Handbook 15-16, '[Organizations] should consider explaining on what 'active membership' or 'good standing' entails for your organization so that it is clearly defined. Due to the fact that the organization [CPE] had not done either, the Statues of SGA clearly state that any students can participate within the election,'" Tabares said.

Wilson argues that the distinction between 'eligible' and 'active' is clear and any rebuttal towards that serves as a smokescreen.

"The SGA advisors acknowledged our bylaws but they essentially just refused to follow them," Wilson said. "For them to pretend that the only rules the CPE could ever have are found in the SGA Statutes is just a ridiculous presumption. Active members have their say because they're actively involved in the organization. It's self-explanatory."

Amidst the chaos of the end of the election meeting, Wilson and others held a vote of what they consider to be 'active' members of the CPE. This small number of voters elected Shivanni Ehsaan as Director and Katherine Draken as Assistant Director. These are the results they are standing by, having since filed an appeal of the initial results to the Supreme Court.

Ehsaan, along with Wilson and the others, said they have a strong disdain for how the entire meeting occurred.

"A lot of our members were irate after the meeting. It had been a blatant violation of our constitution and we felt it was both unfair and not genuine, " she said. "It was also somewhat unusual to see the SGA members so actively involved in the election, asking a lot of questions, facilitating the process, etc."

As both sides try to sift through the linguistic anomalies of bylaws, statutes, and so on, the CPE awaits a chance to take the case to the Supreme Court. They will have to wait until at least May 20, when the Senate will confirm new justices to hear the case in the first session of the summer.

Read or Share this story: <http://fsune.ws/1bQAqXO>